

[William A. Smith]

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FOLKSTUFF-RANGE LORE

Gauthier, Sheldon F.

Rangelore

Tarrant Co., Dist. #7

Page #1

FC 240 [60?]

William A Smith, 71, living at 116, Fahey St. Fort Worth, Texas, was born July 28th, 1866, on a plantation near Shreveport, Louisiana. His family moved to the Red River section of Texas, and located on a farm near the town of Clarksville in Red River County, when he was 15 years old. He was desirous of becoming a cowboy and at the age of 18 secured employment on the McGill Ranch where he worked 10 years.

He returned to farming in 1894 and followed that vocation until [1933?], at which time he retired.

He married Rose Goode in 1903. There were nine children born to the couple. He came to Fort Worth in 1933, and has since made the city his home.

His story of range life follows;

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"I have had ten years experience on a cow-ranch. I did everything that an alkli is called upon to do. I began as a tenderfoot of the purest type and ended up as a seasoned rawhide, that is what the boys called an old timer.

"I was born near Shreveport Louisiana, July 28th, 1866. My folks moved to the Red River section of Texas, to farm. I was bent on becoming a cowhand, so started out to find some outfit that would take me on. I was not long, about the second day I stopped at the McGill ranch and was given a nest. C12- Texas

"I was 18 years old and a husky stripling for my age. The only thing I could/ do on a ranch then was ride a hoss tolerably well. I located the ramrod and hit him for a job, of course the first question he shot at me was," are you a greener or a rawhide?" I told him I had never worked on a ranch, but could ride a hoss. He sized me up for a spell and then sez; 2 "Do you know what it takes to be a cowhand?"

""Hard work", I answered, "and would like to learn how to do it".

"Well, hard work is a part of it, but there is more than that. It takes a hoss and a man with guts. Have you rocks in your craw?. He inquired.

"Sure I have and lots of it", I said.

"That answer satisfied him and I was hired at the sum of \$15. a month until I showed him I was not a knothed and had the requirements. If I shaped up to his satisfaction, I was to receive \$20. the following month. If I failed I was to get my walking orders.

"He called the rangeboss and ordered him to take me in charge. The top-screw sez to me, "come greener, I'll show you where the dog house is, where we do our flopping and point out your crum incubator. Now, I was fresh off the farm and the term greener was fitting for me. That was my first time to meet up with a cow outfit. When he sez, "I'll show you where the dog house is and point out the crum incubator", that caused me to turn over in my mind

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whether or not I wanted [?] sleep with a bunch of dogs. When we reached the bunkhouse I was relieved to learn what he ment by the dog house and the the crum incubator was my bunk.

“The boys all became very chummy and told me that it was best to start out with a gentle hoss and gradually work up to handling the snakes. The top-screw sez that it was his duty to start the tenderfoots off with a gentle hoss and that 3 he had one in the remuda made to order for a greener [?] being gentle could do everything on the range, but throw the rope. All the friendly talk made me feel good and I was at home right off and among friends.

“The next morning, before daylight, the boys started to get up and I hopped out of bed, being anxious to get started. When the belly-cheater hollered, “come for your morning's hell”, I was ready and went to get the chuck chewing over with, so I mount my hoss and get started with my first day of work as a cowhand.

“We all, soon/ were done with swallowing our hot cakes, saddle blankets the cowhands called those, our hot blak coffee, broiled [deef?] steak and gravy, which was called sop. It was well cooked and I enjoyed the meal. Getting the chewing over with, we all sauntered out to the corral.

“There stood a hoss, all saddled and snubed to a post. The top-screw sez,” there is your mount kid” and don't drive him hard”.

“I had hoss experience and had been taught to always pull the critter's head over to it's side while mounting a buckner, or a strange hoss that you were not acquainted with, so It could not elevate until after the mount was made. If there was to be any show I wanted to be seated, but was not expecting any action, or funny business. I got seated and turned that critters head loose. Well, when I did, there was an exploision. That critter went up high and wiggled out from under me, faster than a hell-diver goes under water. He left me in the air with nothing to sit on, so I came back to the earth suddenly and I sure hit hard 4 I got

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up and looked around and saw sitting on the op'ra house, that is the top rail of the corral, all the hands splitting their guts with laughter.

"It flashed through my knot at once what the gang had done. I had my dander up, not at the boys, but because I let a hoss throw me. I insisted that I could ride that hoss without being spilled and demanded another chance, but the top-screw would have none of it. He then told me about the hoss. It did not belong to the ramrod, but was the property of Ben Devenprt, and no one had been able to ride him, except his owner. With Ben it was different, the hoss hoss would do anything Ben called [upon?] it to do.

"I was then given a hoss that [?] could ride, in fact, seven hosses that were to be mine for use in my work.

"From that first morning on, the boys did everything they could to help me and break me in. It was [long?] until I was working with the best of them and was a real rawhide. My first six months of wages went for an outfit. I spent \$5. for a pair of peewee top boots, \$10. for a hat and \$60 for a saddle. When I got those boots on my hoofs and that conk cover slogged on my head I was in danger of busting a gut with pride.

"My first work was gathering stray cattle. My instructions were to pick up everything with the 'M G' brand on and every critter without a brand that was not with a mother cow. Ben Devenport was my partner. We carried a branding iron and when we found an unbranded critter we would give it the heat. 5 We would start out in the morning with a hunk of jerk, dried beef, a flank of water in our saddle bag and be out all day hunting through the breaks. What we ate was whittled off of the hunk of jerk with a knife. These that we found we would bunch during the day and drive it to the main herd at the end of our day. The hoss I rode knew the work, in fact, he did about all the work. If a critter would make a break the hoss would take out after it and turn it back. If the critter showed the least bit of objections the hoss would bite it a couple times on the flank, and that generally caused the critter to take a different view of the land.

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"From hunting strays, I went to night riding. Now, that is a job when a [nortner?] hits, or a real busting storm makes a visit. Range cattle seem to waite for some pretext of an excuse to go on a stampede. When a storm is brewing the most triffling noise will put them to stirring. I have seen the herd go because a whiffy cat made it's appearance. The worst stampede I ever witnessed was while we were on a drive [?] New Mexico. For a spell McGill sold a great amount of his cattle to New Mexico folks. They were Englishmen, that came to the cattle country with the idea of making lots of money raising T-bone steak.

"One night we had just crossed into the state and the herd was getting ready to bed. We did not expect it to ramine bedded long, because there were signs that a spell of weather was brewing. Suddenly, from around a butt came about 25 Indians on horses and dove into the herd and out before we could get turned around and get a good shot at them. Our few shots were wasted 6 the Indians had left as quick as they had came and the cattle were going at a terrific clip [?] we had to forget the Indians and mind the critters.

"I was flanking with Devenport. Of course we knew that the hand in the lead would try and turn the herd to get it milling, that is traveling in a circle. Our job, with the other boys riding the flank, was to keep the herd bunched, but them Indian had put the fear of hell in those cattle and right off they were going in all directions. We were riding our best and riding hard in the dark and rain it' was a hopeless task because they became scattered, but we were trying.

"Suddenly Davenport's hoss went down, as he was attempting to turn a bunch back to the main herd. There were about 100 of them and we were ahead of the bunch when Devenport spilled. I sez to myself, Ben will get the eternal brand sure. His hoss hit a hole and broke a front leg. I let the cattle go and waited to pick up Ben and fetch him to the camp. Then those critters had passed, I went to the spot and there layed the hoss and Ben standing up with his gun drawn ready to shoot the hoss.

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"What saved Ben, was a deep narrow depression that the cattle were jumping, Ben landed in it.

"He shot his hoss and I drove him back to camp where he got another mount and started out to find the herd. When we returned the boys had, what was left of the herd, [milling?], but we were about 200 head short.

"Of those 25 head, I suppose the Indians got some of the cattle. That was why they stampeded the herd. Stampeding 7 cattle was one of the methods used by the Indians to get meat.

"Now, to get back to Ben, before I start off on some other subject and forget to tell of his powers on a hoss.

"You have herd of men that would ride any hoss that could be straddled. Well, Ben could go beyond riding. I have seen seen him on a bucking hoss and doing tricks while the critter was pitching. Yes sir, I have seen him crawl down one side, [?] under and come up on the opposite side and reseal in the saddle.

"Ben was a character, he could tell stories all day and start in the next morning and do the same thing over without retelling a story. He claimed to have learned the cow business in old Mexico. We often spent the nights listening to Ben, and others, telling stories. I will tell one that Ben would tell when the boys would ask him to chin about his hoss powers. It is as follows as well as I can relate it:

" 'I was doing cow work in old Mex, them greasers kept telling about a wild stallion that was the most beautiful piece of hoss meat nature ever put inside of a hide and his brains was equal to any human's. I at first thought they were issuing talk from a loco weed, but they finally got me to thinking that there was something to their chinning.

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“ It sounded unreasonable to me, but I calculated that being that I did not know everything, that there may be something about hoss life I had not put my lamps on.

“ I told the greasers that If they would tell me the way that would lead me to the animal's stompings I would corral 8 that beauty. They sez that I may as well try to put my foot in my ear at to attempt to corral that hoss, because the most [?] Mex hossmen had tried and made a bust of it, but they gave me the way to drag.

“ It was a spot about 100 miles from where we were and the place layed between tow mountains. In the valley was a stream and that [hors?] could be seen coming to the stream for water every morning just as the sun put in it's appearance.

“ With that information, I started to make the drag and found it without any trouble. I hid myself, off a good piece, in the top of a tree and waited for the critter to appear as and how I had been told. Sure as you are alive, when the sun peeped over the horizon there appeared the animal. It was the most beautiful thing I ever laid my eyes on. He was as white and clean as new fallen snow, a large bushy tail stood out like a swan's neck ant his mane looked like a silver water fall. He held his head like a proud pea-cock and moved with the grace of a ballad dancer. Well, to make a long story short, it was a hoss that would make any lover of hoss flesh leave his family for.

“ Now, how to capture that critter without injuring it, or even putting a blemish on him was the question. It was too pretty to make a mark on its body. So I decided on a scheme. The following morning, before sunup, I submerged myself in the water at his drinking place. I placed a reed in my mouth for breathing purpose and there I layed.

“In due time he arrived and as he lowered her head to 9 to drink. I threw my arms around his head and swung myself onto his back, and what a back for riding.

“Well my buckaroos, there was some pitching. All the buckers you have seen can be rolled into one and that will give you some idea about what I was riding. He pitched for four

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hours and then suddenly stopped. Yes sir, he was a hoss with brains that he used. He knew that he had met his master. From that moment on he moved at my command, with one exception. He would not stay away from his range while I was not working him. I could not stake him. He would break for his range, but would be back the next morning waiting for me. What distant was 100 miles, so that will give you some idea of his speed and with all that speed to ride him was like sitting in a rocking chair.

" Well, I could not stay away from the states and of course had to leave him.'

"That was one of Ben's many tails and a sample of what we did in the dog house at nights.

"During the ten years I worked for McGill, we never had any rustler trouble, but the brand blotters gave the cowmon plenty of trouble West and South of us.

"The range in our section was getting cut up into farms and cattle men began to move father west during the 90's. I decided to start a farm of my own and quit the range in 1904 and farmed the remainder of my working days.

"I married Rose Goode in 1903 and reared nine children. After my children were all grown I moved to Forth Worth, that was in 1933.